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## MUSIC IN OUR LIBRARIES

BY O. G. SONNECK OF THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

POETS and other generous souls have extolled the charms of music until the emotional superiority of music over other arts has become a dogma too venerable for doubt. Possibly the emotional appeal of music is more intense than that of other arts, but the account is squared by several obstructions in the path of that appeal. Chief among these (with all the inherent consequences) is the inordinately complex and costly apparatus required for performance of musical works in the larger forms, such as symphonies, oratorios, operas. The composer faces a second disadvantage in the necessity of recording his thoughts with the help of symbols which can reach the sense appealed to, the ear, only by way of an other sense, the eye. Furthermore, comparatively few music-lovers possess the imagination or the training to transform such visual impressions into the corresponding aural impressions. The accomplishment of "reading the score" of a modern opera, for instance, is an accomplishment indeed, and of truly deterring difficulty. Yet on this very accomplishment of those interested in him every composer sooner or later depends for his intercourse with contemporaries or posterity whenever the performer, the intermediary between composer and public, chooses not to perform a composer's works.

### COMPOSERS NEED MUSICAL WORKS IN LIBRARIES

A minimum of reflection will show how under the circumstances, without the hospitality of libraries, composers are in danger of being shut off from posterity. But there his musical thoughts lie practically buried alive, encapsuled in books of mute hieroglyphics. It is the best the world can offer him until that time when we shall have not merely musical libraries but "museums" of music, where in sundry feasible ways the public appeal of works of musical art will be made to endure, in effect similar to the permanent and ever-direct appeal of paintings, sculptures, etc., in museums of the Fine Arts. A fantastic dream? Not at all; but my present purpose does not permit of unfolding my ideas on this solvable problem of art-conservation and presentation.

If works of musical art, then, must fall back gradually on the hospitality of libraries—from the very nature of music virtually the hospitality of a mausoleum—has the best been made of the situation? Hardly. Musical libraries that are reasonably representative of the mighty growth of musical culture in our country, culture that springs from tender but healthy roots two hundred years old, are too few and far between to suggest a different answer. Perhaps the librarian profession still hesitates to recognize in music intellectual elements not less worthy of attention than genealogy or fiction. Perhaps we suffer from a dearth of expert musical librarians whose authority might compel a more hospitable attitude of mind. Perhaps musicians and music-lovers in musical communities are still too indifferent, or too unaware of their power of concerted action to have the rights of music as a

cultural and therewith civic factor more adequately respected in libraries. Perhaps American libraries are richer in good will than in funds; perhaps the cost of music, comparatively much greater than that of literature, works as a handicap. Whatever the reason or reasons, the fact remains that music is deplorably underfed in the great majority of our libraries. Otherwise cities like New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, St. Louis, Cincinnati, San Francisco, Minneapolis and half a dozen others of our musical centres would not lag so far behind Boston in the possession of a municipal musical library of which all citizens may feel proud. They would not be able to emulate certain unique features of the late Mr. Allen A. Brown's munificent gift to the city of Boston, but if they had started in time and had persevered, they would now, as they ought, possess musical collections fairly equal to his in extent and merit.

### LIBRARIES SHOULD HAVE GREAT MUSIC TOO

In any ambitious community a library without the complete works of Shakespeare, Goethe, Dickens, Ibsen, Molière, Balzac, Dante, Longfellow, Poe—or without various serial works published to embrace a comprehensive selection of representative and historically important literary masterpieces such as Johnson's 75-volume edition of English writers, would very properly invite scornful criticism. Apply a similar test with reference to the great masters of music. Does your local library contain the more or less complete editions of the works of Palestrina, Orlando di Lasso, Bach, Händel, Purcell, Rameau, Grétry, Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Schumann, Mendelssohn, Berlioz, Liszt, Wagner, Verdi? Does it contain such historical publications as the *Denkmäler der Tonkunst* in Austria and Germany, the *Paléographie musicale*, *Les Archives de Maîtres de l'Orgue*, *L'arte musicale in Italia*, *Les maîtres musiciens de la Renaissance française*, the series of volumes of the Musical Antiquarian Society or the other similar undertakings designed to rescue from oblivion and to revive, at least for the student, masters of the past? If by way of excuse the answer be that there is no demand in a particular, supposedly musical community for such publications; that too much of the music is of "purely antiquarian interest" and of too little "musical interest to modern ears," then my counter-argument is: first, that the community is not yet as musically cultured as it thinks it is or ought to be; second, that the tendency to appoint prevalent fashion or taste a complacent judge of art-values of the past is damnable and is more likely than not to lead to a conservatism hostile toward pioneers of the future; third, that "purely antiquarian interest" is not more of a crime and not less of a virtue in music than in other fields of human endeavor represented for that very reason in libraries. My fourth is that much, very much music pleasing to the modern ear is already too dead even for the antiquarian interest, hence might be denied an asylum in libraries on special principles; my fifth,

that a librarian ought not to content himself with giving to the public what it happens to want, but ought to help create a demand for what the public needs; my sixth, that no self-respecting library can afford to be without certain cultural documents whether they be consulted frequently or seldom. Do you ask for more? then my seventh: that the needs of one solitary scholarly specialist should weigh with librarians just as heavily as the wants of a hundred "general" and generally superficial and unproductive readers.

After all, it is not the frequency of use that counts, but the use to which a book is put. A costly and rare book consulted only once in ten years, but then by a man of far-reaching research or codification of research, has justified its acquisition just as much as an inexpensive, commonplace book consulted every day for mere receptive information.

#### PRICES OF RARE AND SERIAL MUSIC

If the absence of works of "antiquarian" or "modern" interest be explained on the grounds of expensiveness, the explanation will carry weight. For it is a regrettable fact that chamber music, orchestra music, opera scores and so forth entail an expenditure which acts as a barrier to the comprehensive acquisition of meritorious music. And when the prices of foreign works of musical art are Americanized, a librarian may well despair of his ability to satisfy the needs of a musical community. When scores of the type mentioned above run in cost anywhere from four to two hundred and fifty dollars, the difficulty of assembling a representative collection of music becomes obvious, not to mention a moderate indulgence in bibliographical rarities or in autograph scores.

On the other hand, however, by no means all desirable and necessary music is beyond reach of even poor institutions. In every country music publishers have sought to meet the situation by issuing the standard works by standard composers for a moderate price. By surveying such editions any librarian with a modicum of expert knowledge may assemble a collection of indispensable works of musical art and of books on music. Indeed, respectable publishers have tried to facilitate his task by forming for him just such collections at a price which, of course, keeps pace with the character, extent and scope of the purchases *en bloc* suggested. Strange to say, either for lack of confidence in the interested disinterestedness of publishers—or for lack of interest or knowledge or ability to resist the temptation of wasting one's meagre funds on favored composers and alluringly advertised expensive publications—or for other reasons it would appear that the movement has not been an unqualified success. True, many small libraries have embraced the opportunities offered, but just as many have neglected them, with the result that the number of reasonably well-equipped public musical libraries seems to be abnormally small in our country.

There is something fundamentally wrong somewhere in the situation if for instance a prominent publisher could sell to private music-lovers many thousand single volumes, but to public libraries only about fifty complete sets of a remarkable publication (now nearing the hundredth volume) which will form a comprehensive musician's library

in itself, costs less than two dollars a volume and for merit belongs to that type and class of publication which ought to be not in fifty, but in a thousand public libraries.

Precisely such serial publications, in a way encyclopedic publications, ought to form the basis of every public collection. It is the centre from which the concentric method of library development can best find its outward impetus; and no other method, provided it be not employed too rigidly or pedantically, will produce equally satisfactory results. Without it the collections will soon become unbalanced; they will suffer from obesity here and from anæmia there. Nor is this all. Such publications, planned as libraries within libraries, lend themselves to bibliographical treatment for reference purposes more readily and more fruitfully than collections formed by picking out this or that work from catalogues. And paradoxical as it may sound, small libraries, with contents of such publications analytically catalogued, will often be in a better position to supply a sudden demand for specimens of work by an out-of-the-way composer than large libraries with an operating force too small or administrative machinery unsuited for proper analysis of collective publications.

#### COST OF A MUSIC SECTION TO A LIBRARY

Occasionally I have been asked to estimate the annual outlay necessary to form a good musical working library satisfactory to readers aesthetically and historically as well as pedagogically inclined.

The question is a rather dangerous one to answer, because such estimates are hardly ever better than guesses or expressions of personal judgment not necessarily in harmony with that of colleagues. Having thus invited criticism of my estimates, I would say that an annual appropriation of three hundred dollars for the purchase of good music and good books on music is the *minimum* expenditure from which to expect results of substantial benefit to even small musical communities. This estimate applies merely to reference libraries, not to circulating libraries with branch offices. Moreover, it takes into account only the acquisition of printed music and does not concern itself with a collection of talking-machine records or player-piano rolls, so useful and desirable for purposes of *vulgarisation* as the French would say. The larger a community is, or the more it bubbles over with musical activities, the more inadequate such a small annual appropriation as the above naturally becomes. If we pass on to our musical centres, or would-be musical centres, even one thousand dollars will prove insufficient if music really is meant to find a place in the public library in keeping with the community's interest in music.

In my humble opinion the public libraries in cities like those mentioned above would deserve no *ordre pour le mérite* for exceptional services rendered, if their annual appropriation for music and books on music reached or exceeded two thousand dollars. They would really be doing their duty only (and not more) toward music and its devotees by spending that sum every year. Even so, they would soon discover that the intelligent annual expenditure of two thousand dollars will not nowadays cover the field of legitimate ambition and that their musical collection will retain at that rate the characteris-

tics of a good "working library" on a fairly large scale, but will never develop into a really first-class library of international importance for antiquarian research or study of modern music.

#### ON MUSIC IN THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

These estimates will come as a shock to hard-pressed librarians and library trustees. I tender my sympathy; yet I must adhere to my estimates, since they are based on our experiences at the Library of Congress. There we have spent each year since 1902 vastly more than two thousand dollars on music and books on music. In fact, in one year necessity or opportunity, as one might prefer to call it, compelled us to spend not very far from ten times that amount. Nor do the more than 80,000 "pieces" (so-called in bibliographical jargon) purchased since 1902—and representing about one-tenth only of the entire collection—tell the whole story. The other nine-tenths consist of the American musical copyright deposits that have accumulated since about 1820 and the European deposits since 1890. Blessed are they who do not come into contact with the bulk of this music; but of the about 25,000 publications drawn from the Copyright Office at the Library of Congress into its Music Division every year, perhaps one-fifth is music which any library might care to purchase if it could afford it. If one considers that these 5000 publications include hundreds of scores of expensive chamber and orchestra music, and opera scores by composers of standing or promise, the estimate of a value of five thousand dollars certainly must be conceded to be conservative.

#### PLEA FOR LARGER GIFTS OF MUSIC TO LIBRARIES

With such a steady influx of material by way of copyright deposits or purchase (not to mention valuable gifts of autograph compositions by American composers) the collections in custody of the Music Division of the Library of Congress *in their totality* can not help surpassing not only in quantity (mere numerical superiority would be of little moment) but in quality and scope all other American collections by far and, within certain limits, rivaling the foremost collections abroad. But this is not the deduction from the above excursion

into statistics here intended. The plea is for a very much more enlightened, for a very much less philistine and stingy consideration of musical art in American libraries. Perhaps the financial burden suggested will be borne more cheerfully and more willingly if it be considered that even the unprecedented financial support that music finds in the Library of Congress does not by any manner of means put us in possession of "all the music published in the world," as vocal Baedekers have it on sight-seeing automobiles. We do not harbor the ambition to suffer from such a horrible affliction. The few library experts, who really know how much or how little music cast in certain forms of art is preserved in famous libraries, also know the difficulty of assembling enough of the entire literature to form a collection of preëminent importance and usefulness.

The Library of Congress may have reason to believe that it now houses collections of operatic music, orchestral music, chamber music, books on music, old and new and so forth second to none for purposes of serious art-study; that it can now place on exhibition an accumulation of musical rarities sufficient to force the blush of emotion in even the most blasé of connoisseurs, but no more than any other library can it claim completeness for special fields. While it may claim absolute superiority in some respects over all other institutions, on the other hand it must acknowledge an inferiority in other respects to certain institutions abroad that is pathetic; for instance, in the matter of autograph scores of great masters or of codices illustrating medieval music. Their cost and scarcity simply prohibit any attempt at rivalry. Hence it was the part of easy wisdom to curb ambition where ambition would have been ludicrous.

Which is a convenient way of insisting that even the Library of Congress is too poor for rendering a national service musically on a scale befitting the National library of the United States. Advisedly I say "a national service" because many visitors still entertain the strange belief that the Library of Congress is a local institution for the exclusive benefit of Washington! In that case its musical collections would have become by this time a grotesque anomaly.

O. G. Sonneck

## THE ALLY

Not all his virtues wrought his vast renown  
As that old sin—deep crouched within his soul,  
In vigilance to rend him unawares—  
And of his shamed despair take fiercer toll.

Such was the bitter price of his vast powers—  
Of his sure strength and dauntless self-control;  
A guide unerring in his trial hours—  
A helm, that swung him to a splendid goal!

Laura Simmons